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In the Breeding Home of Clarke's Nutcracker.

(*Nucifraga columbiana*.)

AN ACCOUNT OF THE TAKING OF ITS NEST AND EGGS IN UTAH, MARCH, 1900.

BY H. C. JOHNSON, AMERICAN FORK, UTAH.*

[Read before the Northern Division of the Cooper Orn. Club, May. 5, 1900.]

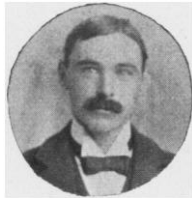
BEFORE describing the finding of the nests and eggs of this species in the Wasatch Mountains of Utah in March of the present year, it may be interesting to review, briefly, the early history of the bird, with such remarks as are pertinent to the little-known nesting habits of the species, and the present known sets in collections.

Lewis' and Clarke's Expedition was responsible for the discovery of three birds new to science; the Louisiana Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*), Lewis's Woodpecker (*Melanerpes torquatus*), and Clarke's Crow (*Nucifraga columbiana*.) This expedition in charge of the two officers of the United States Army whose names it bore, was sent out by the Government in 1804-6. It explored from sources of the Missouri River, across the Rocky Mountains and down the Columbia River to the Pacific Ocean. The first mention ever made of the bird whose name heads this sketch is found in the journal of

Capt. William Clarke. It reads: "On the afternoon of August 22nd, 1805, among the woods I observed a new species of woodpecker (?), the face and tail of which are white, wings black, and every other part of the body dark brown and its size was that of a robin."

A singularly incorrect description of the bird and its size! From one specimen, — the only one brought back by the expedition—Alex. Wilson formally described the species in his *American Ornithology* III, 1811, on page 29, and figures the bird quite correctly in plate XX, Fig. 2, naming it after Capt. Clarke. The type specimen was deposited in Peale's Museum in Philadelphia, then the foremost museum in America.

The breeding habits of Clarke's Nutcracker remained a secret for many years, the first authentic sets being those taken and recorded by Bendire from Camp Harney, Oregon, as follows: April 22, 1876, one nest with one young bird and two chipped eggs, twenty-five feet from the ground in a large pine tree; April 4, 1878, same locality, nest and three incubated eggs. Thrown to



H. C. JOHNSON,

WHO SECURED THE NUTCRACKERS' EGGS.

*I am indebted to Miss Jean Bell for valuable notes concerning the early history of Clarke's Crow, as well as the record of the sets of this species previously known to science.—H. C. J.

ground and lost. In a pine tree forty feet from the ground; April 8, 1878, nest and two eggs with large embryos. In a pine sixteen feet from the ground. All the nests were at an altitude of from 5,000 to 5,500 feet. Ten years later Mr. Denis Gale of Gold Hill, Boulder Co., Colorado found a nest on March 5, 1888 in a scrubby pine eight feet high containing three eggs. On April 16, 1889 he found another nest and three eggs in a pine nine feet high

specimen of the bird which I used to show prospective collectors as a sort of object lesson. I am indebted to Miss Jean Bell of Pennsylvania for specific and intelligent notes on the life history of Clarke's Crow which definitely fixed the breeding time for Utah in a mild year, and ultimately led to the taking of the nests and eggs.

The several expeditions which I have sent out have met with the varying results detailed below. The Olsen-

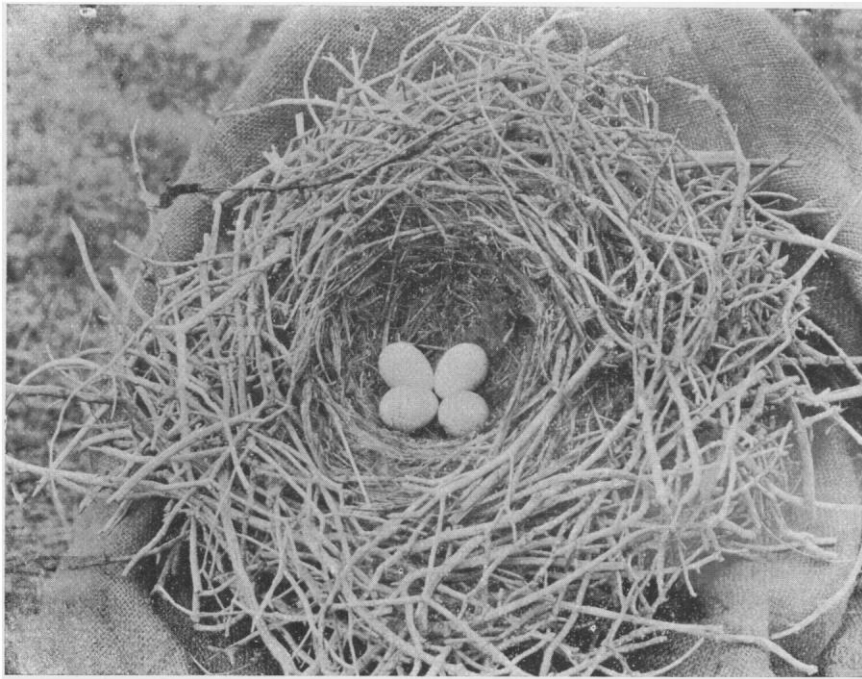


Photo by W. H. Parker.

NEST AND EGGS OF CLARKE'S NUTCRACKER (*Nucifraga columbianus*)

Wasatch Mts., Utah, March 1900.

at an altitude of 8,500 feet. The first set is now in the National Museum. Capt. B. F. Goss found nests with young in Colorado in 1879, but the only nests and eggs recorded up to this year were the four already mentioned.

I have been trying to obtain nests and eggs of this species for several years and with this end in view, have secured the services of various intelligent campers and miners who are at home in the hills. I had a mounted

Ambrose expedition to the Tintic Range during the third week in March 1899, reported birds mated. Two were shot, but only one secured,—a female in full breeding plumage. One old nest was found in a black balsam tree on a horizontal limb three feet from the trunk, and was supposed to be of this species. One bird was observed chasing a Golden Eagle in a manner similar to that of blackbirds worrying a passing hawk. The Ambrose-Olsen-Johnson expedition

to Springville Canon and Strawberry Peak in April 1899 was unsuccessful on account of snow, though small flocks and single birds had been reported in the vicinity in the fall of 1898 and the winters of 1898 and 1899. Following this came Hines' three days' trip in March, 1900, to the head of American Fork Canon. Several birds were seen but were very wild and shy.

Adams in the vicinity of Pleasant Valley Junction reported birds in some abundance in early March, 1900, and breeding. Hines of American Fork Canon reported the birds common, excepting in breeding season. They are usually in flocks and are noisy, bold and rapacious. Living in a two-story house, a relic of the once prosperous days of the Miller mine, he once set some rat poison baits on the second floor near the stairs. Returning after a short absence he found several dead "Camp Robbers" which had flown upstairs to get the bait. He once caught a bold fellow in his hand while eating dinner. It struggled, as Mr. Hines thought, to get away, but happening to put his other hand containing some bread near it, the bird rapidly ate until it could hold no more.

The Dunsden-Wilkin expedition to the mountains north-west of American Fork Canon, Utah Co. March 15-31, 1900, proved to be successful. This party secured a nest with one egg, capturing the male parent on the nest by hand, and also a nest and four eggs and later a nest with three young and parent. The first nest containing one egg was found March 23 in a black balsam tree about fifty feet high in the pronged fork of a limb growing outwardly, and then upward. The nest was about three feet from the body of the tree and sixteen feet from the ground. The nest was in rather plain view though overhung with a thick canopy of dense boughs. The situation was about 7,000 feet altitude and about 1,000 feet below the ridge of the mountain on the side of a sheltered gulch facing the south.

The nest and four eggs were found March 23, 1900, about 1,000 feet from the first nest and was also in a black balsam tree 70 feet high and thirty inches in diameter at its base. The nest was thirty feet from the ground, saddled on a horizontal limb about seven feet from the body of the tree. This nest could only be seen from one position on the ground. The set was collected on March 28. Many attempts were made to secure the parent alive, but it always left the nest as the collector had his hand nearly upon it. The nest contained four eggs when found and after five days had elapsed, incubation appeared but slight. March 28 the final attempt to secure the parent was made, but without success. As she left the nest Mr. Wilkin shot at her, but missed. The set was then secured with nest.

It will thus be seen how extremely uncertain is the finding of the nests of Clarke's Crow in any locality. Where the birds are plentiful one year they are absolutely wanting the next, owing to absence or presence of food supply. Roaming over the country in bands, stealing, prying, inquisitive, noisy "soldiers of fortune," they become locally known as "camp robbers," "pinon bird" or "mutton bird." Some one of these names will be instantly recognized by anyone who lives at various seasons in the hills of Utah. It is partly on account of this nomadic tendency and partly because they breed so early, while the ranges are enveloped in mantles of deepest snow, that their nests are so difficult to locate. In fact, the absence of snow this season,—an unusual one here—is what rendered progression over the hills possible and the locating and taking of the eggs a possibility.

In their noisy, roving rambles the Clarke's Crows are singularly like another rare bird,—the Carolina Parakeet of Florida and southern border states. James Preston of this city has often told me how an immense flock of Nutcrack-

ers in the Deep Creek country of western Utah, by suddenly taking wing and making voice, actually stampeded a herd of cattle which he was driving. Mr. Nelson and others tell me that in the Tintic Range, in early March, he has seen companies estimated at "several hundred."

The eggs of different sets vary considerably in size. Mr. Gale's Colorado sets measure respectively (Set 1) 1.37x.90, 1.36x.89, 1.32x.89; (Set 2) 1.34x.90, 1.37x.91, 1.39x.92 inches. Major Bendire's Oregon sets are smaller, measuring: (Set 1) 1.22x.95, 1.20x.90; (Set 2) 1.26x.95, 1.30x.92 inches. The four eggs in my first set are elongate-ovate in shape; the ground color is of the clearest pale green, covered with small flecks and spots of lavender and brown. These small spots are distributed over two-thirds of the largest ends of the eggs, the pointed ends being almost the plain ground color. There is no tendency to a wreathing of the markings, nor is the primary greenish ground hidden to any extent by the minute spots. The eggs are rather thin shelled, smooth, glossy and closely grained and measure 1.39x.99, 1.38x.98, 1.38x.97 and 1.34x1.00 inches. The first three eggs are of the elongate type while the fourth is more obtuse and broader, as will be seen by

the measurements. Taken altogether I consider the eggs, as seen reposing in their cumbrous nest bed of juniper bark strips, with a framing of matted juniper (*Juniperus occidentalis*) twigs, a very beautiful type of birds' egg. The one egg taken March 23 measures 1.33x.94 inches.

On March 31, 1900, my same collectors found a nest containing three young birds about three days old. The parent was easily caught by hand and placed on the edge of the nest while he examined the nestlings. She remained there the whole time, thus evincing a wonderful example of maternal love for her offspring. The nest, young and parent were collected April 13, the male parent being shot on returning to the nest. On examination by the writer, the throat of the adult bird appeared to protrude to a great degree and on opening the bill it was found to be literally packed with the small seeds of the pinon pine, carefully cleaned from the shells, and no doubt intended to be exuded for the benefit of the young, which were very fat and evidently thriving on the diet. All of the above sets, nests and birds taken by my collectors in Utah this year are now in the collection of Miss Jean Bell of Ridley Park, Pennsylvania.



The Woodpeckers of the Upper Salinas Valley.

BY CHAS. S. THOMPSON, PASO ROBLES, CAL.

[Read before the Northern Division of the Cooper Orn. Club, Jan. 6, 1900.]

FROM the northern boundary of San Luis Obispo County south to the source of the Salinas River, the country is known as the upper Salinas Valley. It is rolling, and white oaks of two species are the most plentiful trees in the hills, while cottonwoods are the characteristic trees of the river bottom. With such a combination it is not at all strange that woodpeckers are plentiful both as regards numbers and species. In three seasons' collecting in the upper Salinas Valley I have taken the eggs of five species of woodpeckers,

as follows:—Gairdner's (*Dryobates pubescens gairdnerii*) Nuttall's (*Dryobates nuttalli*), Californian (*Melanerpes formicivorus bairdi*) and Lewis's (*Melanerpes torquatus*), besides the Red-shafted Flicker (*Colaptes cafer*). Of the six species all but the Red-breasted Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus ruber*) are residents, both winter and summer. The sapsucker, however, is seen only during the winter and is never common. Cabanis's Woodpecker (*Dryobates villosus hyloscopus*) may also be found here sparingly, but as I have never yet seen it, I shall